

Wisconsin **Department of Natural Resources** **OUTDOOR REPORT**

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Outdoor Report as of March 20, 2014

Spring may have officially begun with the arrival of the vernal equinox on Thursday this week, but at least in northern Wisconsin old man winter is not ready loosen his grip. Some areas of the north received between 8 to 12 inches of new snow in the last week, and about the northern third of the state continues to report that snowmobile and cross-country ski conditions are in good to excellent condition.

Both snowmobile and ski groomers were out again this week after the new snowfall and are reporting trails are in exceptional condition for this late in March. Conditions may change rapidly with a warm up in the forecast this week, but temperatures are expected to drop again for the weekend, providing some good late season winter recreation opportunities.

The winter severity index that wildlife biologists use to track the impact of cold and snow on wildlife is now at severe or very severe at most locations across the north, with the Spooner area tying and expecting to surpass the record for the severest index since biologists began keeping the records in 1960.

There is still 20 to 30 inches of ice on northern lakes, with layers of crusted snow and slush. Wardens caution that conditions have become quite unpredictable with many people reporting getting stuck in deep slush pockets. In the south smaller lakes with river current and some rivers have begun to open up. While most larger lakes still have ice cover, shorelines are beginning to open up making access difficult.

Anglers continue to fish Green Bay with reports of whitefish and northern pike and some perch along both the east and west shores. Southern Lake Michigan tributaries are opening up, but they are running high cloudy. The lake front has opened up at Racine, but the fishing piers remain covered with ice. People continued to fish for brown and rainbow trout through the ice in harbors.

The main channel of the Mississippi River has opened up, but ice along the shorelines and fishing barges has limited early walleye and sauger fishing. The Wisconsin River is also opening up and there was some successful walleye fishing below the Prairie du Sac dam this week.

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While the north remains locked in snow, snow cover is rapidly disappearing from the south and wildlife and bird activity has increased greatly in the last week. Horicon Theresa and other large marshes are thawing, with many water birds returning.

Fox and coyotes are being seen during the day as they patrol territories and red fox kits are being born. White-tail bucks are shedding antlers and shed hunters have been out in good numbers, and they are being asked to report any dead deer they encounter to local wardens or wildlife biologists.

Sandhill cranes have arrived on territories and are displaying and calling. There have been a few reports of tom turkeys and starting to gobble and display. The first few days and nights of over 50 degrees will begin the process of frogs and other amphibians to emerge from winter hibernation. Volunteers are being sought to help conduct frog surveys this spring. Search the DNR website for “frog surveys” for more information.

And a sure sign that spring is actually on its way, there were reports that maples are being tapped and buckets hung in sugar bushes across the state.

Statewide Birding Report

Spring is creeping forward as new migrants have begun to pour into southern and central Wisconsin. With recent warmer temps and the subsequent snowmelt, there has been a notable increase in waterfowl and water birds across the southern tier of counties. Birders are reporting widespread arrivals of sandhill cranes, great blue herons and the occasional killdeer. Geese and ducks are using sheet water ponds in wetlands and crop fields. Puddle duck and goose numbers are still below peak but birders have reported seeing greater white-fronted geese, cackling geese, pintails, green-winged teal, widgeon and a few wood ducks. Small lakes with river current and some rivers have begun to open up, providing habitat for diving ducks. Ice cover on Lake Michigan has been reduced substantially and birders are reporting red-throated loon, red-necked grebes, and some nice movements of long-tailed ducks. Other arrivals this week in the south include a few eastern meadowlarks, red-winged blackbirds, rusty blackbirds, grackles and widespread arrival of American robins and song sparrows. Raptors moving this week include golden and bald eagles as well as northern harriers and red-shouldered hawks. Snowy Owls are still being seen statewide, but they are starting to move back north. This winter has provided some incredible concentrations of snowy owls including six seen in one place recently in northern Dane County. Birders have also turned up a new gyrfalcon location in southern Columbia County near the Audubon Goose Pond preserve. Birders can expect to continue to see good waterfowl movements over the next week as rains and warmer temps continue to provide habitat in agricultural areas. American woodcock should also begin to arrive and display on territories in the next week on warmer nights. As always, please help us track this year's migration event by submitting your sightings into Wisconsin eBird at www.ebird.org/WI. - Andy Paulios, wildlife biologist, Fitchburg

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Northern Region

Superior DNR Service Center area

Brule River State Forest - Today's date shows that it is the spring equinox (<http://www.weather.gov/cle/Seasons>) but old man winter is not ready to let up on the north yet! We received around 8 inches of new snow out of the last storm and it looks like more is on the way. March is certainly our snow month and as the ice continues to recede on Lake Superior the area could see more lake effect snow. We still have 15 inches of trail base and 31 inches of woods base at the Afterhours cross-country ski trail. It looks like we will be in the mid to upper 30s for the next couple of days and then we will be back into the 20s for highs for the foreseeable forecast. Skiers should still have plenty of opportunity to ski for a while yet! The Brule River will open for fishing from Highway 2 to Lake Superior on March 29. The parking areas are being plowed in preparation for the opener. One of the Brule River State Forest Rangers stated that the River near the Copper Range Campground area is still frozen over and Mays Ledges area has a slight corridor of open water...but mostly ice. The breeding season for bald eagles has begun. New pairs are being established and existing pairs are reestablishing their pair bonds. New nests are being built and old nests are being repaired. Southern migrant birds are just beginning to show up. A couple of robins have been reported and some geese are making their way north. The geese are staying around the open river areas. More LTE (Limited Term Employee) positions for the DNR are being advertised (2 in Brule and one in Ashland) and many application deadlines are coming up. For more information please see <http://dnr.wi.gov/x87201/employment/lte/q207ltes.asp> - Catherine Khalar, visitor services associate

Ashland DNR Service Center area

Bayfield County - The Drummond area received 12 inches of fresh snow this week and the groomers have already hit the trails, which should in excellent condition for the weekend, with another 4-6 inches of snow expected on Friday. Snowmobilers traveling near Valhalla commented they too are in excellent condition. With the upcoming warm weather, road routes might get a bit muddy in some areas. Area cross-country ski trails are in excellent condition. Those attempting to fish area lakes are restricted to foot travel only, due to heavy snow and slush conditions, though they are catching some nice bag limits of bluegill and crappie on Namakagon and the Eau Claire Chain. - Jill Scharfner, conservation warden, Drummond

Hayward DNR Service Center area

Sawyer County - A hint for Northwoods landowners concerned about the effects of this severe winter on the whitetail deer in their neighborhood: Consider felling a few sugar maple trees for browse. I live on a 5-acre tract of land near Moose Lake east of Hayward where there are maple trees to spare. Some are diseased or badly formed. Others are simply too crowded to allow for good growth of otherwise healthy trees. The deer in my neighborhood have responded to the culling of weak or surplus maple trees by browsing all the new growth at the tips of branches, usually within a week after felling. This natural browse is far better than corn for their digestive systems. Based on their apparent condition, I think the deer in my neighborhood are going to survive this brutal winter. When the snow finally melts, there will be a mess to clean up. But the deer will have made use of some of it; and much of the rest will be converted to high-quality firewood. A win-win for everyone. - Dave Neuswanger, fisheries supervisor, Hayward

Spooner DNR Service Center area

Washburn County - Last week's warm up created a layer of crust that could be walked on in most areas. Our winter severity is the highest on record since 1960 in Spooner. Someday the snow will melt and the sharp-tailed grouse will begin to dance. To sign up visit the Friends of the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area website at www.fnbwa.org. - Nancy Christel, wildlife biologist, spooner

On Wednesday, March 19, we will be tying the Winter Severity Index record at the Spooner location. The current storm tracking through northwestern Wisconsin will result in snow depths lasting longer (exceeding the 18-inch level) combined with forecasted below average temperatures we will be counting more snow days resulting in a new WSI record. We have been keeping WSI data since 1960. – Mike Zeckmeister, wildlife supervisor

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Park Falls DNR Service Center area

Upper Chippewa Basin fisheries report (Price, Rusk, Sawyer Taylor and inland Ashland and Iron counties)

- Once again this week ice conditions remain relatively unchanged on lakes across the area. The ice cover ranges from 22 to 30 inches thick, with the upper third of that consisting of several layers of crusted snow and slush. This continues to make access conditions tough, as most motorized vehicles break through the first layer or two of slush. As such, fishing pressure has remained minimal and there have been very few panfish anglers venturing out. The few anglers that have been out report low success, with just a few crappie and perch being caught. Most anglers are waiting for a spring thaw and water to start running down the holes, as this usually spurs a late-ice panfish bite. - *Skip Sommerfeldt, senior fisheries biologist, Park Falls*

Price County - Ice anglers and snowmobilers should take caution and do some homework before venturing out onto local lakes. Conditions have become quite unpredictable with many people reporting getting stuck in deep slush pockets. Conditions can change day to day with the top crust softening on warmer days. Travelers have suggested staying on packed trails and avoiding untraveled areas with deeper snow drifts. Anglers have reported catching nice size crappie and bluegill on local lakes despite having to work harder to get out on the ice. - *Dan Michels, conservation warden, Park Falls*

Flambeau River State Forest - Snowmobile trails still have a good base and are open. The Flambeau Hills Ski trail is being packed today (March 20) and will be tracked tomorrow and should be in good to excellent condition. We are starting to see signs of spring in the forest. We are seeing raccoons, skunks, and even a few ducks looking for open water as well as robins starting to appear. We still have 24+ inches of snow in the woods. Local maple syrup enthusiasts are still waiting to tap trees. Spring temperatures are slow coming this year. - *Judy Freeman, visitor services associate*

Woodruff DNR Service Center area

Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest – The Escanaba cross-country ski trail remains in good condition. It was packed and tracked March 19 after the area received 3-4 inches of new snow this week. There is 25 inches of snow measured on undisturbed picnic table. Cold weather for this weekend so tracks may still be good. If conditions allow, crews may groom again for the cold weather days so stay tuned in. That most likely will be our last hurrah for grooming. – *Dan Jacoby, forestry facilities worker*

Raven and McNaughton cross-country ski trails were groomed and tracked March 18 and are in good condition. - *Tony Martinez, forestry facilities worker*

Florence DNR at the Florence Natural Resource Center

Florence and Forest counties - As of today there is about 3 inches fresh snow in Florence. Trails are still open in Florence and Forest Counties, but there is ice under the fresh snow. No signs of migration seen, but some dormant mammals are starting to emerge. Yep, it is still winter. - *Anna Jahns, wildlife technician, Florence*

Northeast Region

Northern Lake Michigan fisheries team report - *Compiled by David Boyarski, fisheries supervisor, Sturgeon Bay*

Marinette County - Peshtigo Harbor area anglers targeted pike in 4 to 12 feet of water using smelt fished on the bottom or large shiner minnows fished a foot off bottom. Some walleye and trout anglers fished around the dam on the Menominee River and were casting into open water. - *Kevin King, fisheries technician, Peshtigo*

Oconto County - At Geano Beach anglers caught whitefish and walleye south of the landing out to the reef jigging stick baits tipped with minnow heads or wax worms. Pike and whitefish anglers from Oconto Breakwater Park to Oconto Park II had success fishing from the mouth of the Oconto River to Larson's reef. Pike anglers used large shiner minnows and smelt in 4 to 12 feet of water. - *Kevin King, fisheries technician, Peshtigo*

Brown County - Walleye were caught by anglers fishing Voyageur Park and the Fox Point Boat Landing jigging stick baits in bold colors. Perch were caught using jigs and Swedish pimples tipped with wax worms in 9 to 15 feet of water. Sunset Beach anglers caught some whitefish and walleye jigging and using tip ups with small minnows. - *Kevin King, fisheries technician, Peshtigo*

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Door County - Temperatures increased substantially this past week creating slick and slushy ice conditions but anglers were still able to drive to their favorite fishing spot. Troublesome areas included Carmody Park, Wood Lane and Stone Quarry where most areas anglers accessed the ice by ATV or snowmobile. Anglers pulled shanties closer to shore in a lot of areas and fishing pressure was low this past week and picked up on the weekend. Anglers fishing in Little Sturgeon area reported 30 to 36 inches of ice while fishing in Riley's Bay, Sand Bay Resort and Carmody Park. Anglers targeted perch, whitefish and walleye. Whitefish anglers at Sand Bay Resort used wax worms and stick baits in 30 to 90 feet of water and reported good success. Anglers fishing for whitefish off Big Rock Place this past week used jigging stick baits to bring in a few whitefish. At Carmody Park some whitefish anglers reported success using panfish jigs. At Town Park Road perch fishing was good using minnows in 35 feet of water. Dykesville anglers reported low success rates and reported ice to be anywhere from 22 to 36 inches thick. Whitefish anglers fishing off Bayshore Park reported some success using wax worms in 15 to 20 feet of water. Many whitefish anglers fished off Volk's Landing and had success in 5 to 14 feet of water using wax worms and stick baits. At Rite's Cove perch anglers drove onto the ice and reported the most success in 40 feet of water using small minnows. - *Bobbi Kolstad, fisheries technician, Sturgeon Bay*

Peshtigo DNR Service Center area

Marinette County - Winter is still holding on in Marinette County. Open areas still have 10-12 inches of snow with a fairly heavy crust while the wooded portions have more than 20 inches with a light crust. Deer are utilizing swamp conifer stands heavily right now but also taking advantage of standing corn. Be especially careful while driving in areas with corn on one side of the road and conifer cover on the other. Spring is inching slowly forward and with it, sap is starting to flow on warmer days. Many taps were put in and buckets hung on maple trees over the weekend. Travel on area lakes has improved recently with much of the snow melted and refrozen and lots of roads plowed to sites of previous shacks. The ice is thick (around 24 inches) on most lakes and fishing is spotty, but promises to improve as we get into spring. - *Aaron McCullough, wildlife technician, Wausaukee*

Oconto County - Snowmobile trails in northern Oconto County are still open and listed in fair to poor condition, but new snow was received on March 19. Panfish are biting on the Machickanee Flowage but the landing is in poor condition. The safest travel would be by ATV. There are reports of northern pike becoming increasingly active along the west shore. Reports came in of one fish over 40 inches this past week. There are also reports of some trout being caught below the Stiles Dam. - *Mike Stahl, conservation warden, Oconto Falls*

Shawano County - The snow is melting but there is still plenty of ice for fishing. Access is bit easier as of late. Panfish, especially perch, are being caught on Shawano Lake. Most of the snowmobile trails are closed but a few remain open so check with the hotline to see which trails may still offer some snowmobiling. There still seems to be plenty of snow in the wood. As folks start to venture out please call if you are finding dead deer or turkeys. - *Jim Horne, conservation warden, Shawano*

Green Bay DNR Service Center area

Manitowoc County - Anglers have begun to see and catch rainbows and a few brown trout at the Shoto dam on the West Twin River in Manitowoc County. Only several hundred yards of open water exists from the dam down river and water levels continue to rise. - *David Allen, conservation warden, Mishicot*

Sturgeon Bay DNR Service Center area

Door County - Sunny days and milder temperatures are exposing many high points in southern Door County fields; much to the joy of wildlife, and much to the dismay of snowmobilers. Deer and turkeys are now taking advantage of these open areas, but those open areas have also caused southern Door County snowmobile trails to close. Ice on Green Bay will be fishable for some time, with northern pike, walleye, and whitefish seasons still open. Despite the nearly 3 feet of ice in some areas, the shoreline ice in many places is starting to deteriorate due to vehicle traffic, warm water run-off, and heating of the adjacent land. Anglers need to be cautious using vehicles in these near shore areas. Also, the U.S. Coast Guard has begun ice breaking operations in many areas, including Sturgeon Bay proper, to prepare for the start of the commercial shipping season. For more information on exact timing of Green Bay ice breaking operations contact the USCG; Sault Vessel Traffic at 906-635-3232 or via e-mail at sootfc@uscg.mil. - *Christopher J. Kratcha, conservation warden, Sturgeon Bay*

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Peninsula State Park - Snow depth varies up to 18 inches, with 3 inches new snow on March 19. Watch for icy/slippery conditions throughout the park. Ski trails are in poor to good condition. Yellow, Orange and White loops were groomed on March 20. Snowshoe and hiking trails are open. Sledding Hill is open. The parking lot across from the hill is closed. Please park in the clubhouse lot (stickers required). Snowmobile trails are open and in fair to good condition. For more information check Door County Parks <http://map.co.door.wi.us/parks/snowmobile.htm> (exit DNR) This report will be updated when conditions change. - *Jane Barnowsky, visitor services associate*

Wautoma DNR Service Center area

Waupaca County - Snowmobile Trails within Waupaca County are now all closed. The spring migration is beginning. Some people have sighted sandhill cranes, turkey vultures, red shouldered hawks, woodcock, and red-winged black birds. Catch and release trout season has not generated much interest this year, possibly due to the snow and below normal temperatures. - *Ted Dremel, conservation warden, Wautoma*

The snow has settled quite a bit and trails are now mostly closed. Turkeys are now gobbling, and sandhill cranes are arriving back. Some trout streams are now open, with no reports on early season success. There is very little ice fishing pressure right now. Deer active is high during all hours on newly thawed fields. - *Karl Kramer, wildlife technician, Wautoma*

Wausara County - Snow was beginning to melt quite well and we were beginning to think spring until Tuesday night and another inch of snow hit. The snow may help Zone 1 of the snowmobile trails stay open a few more days at least. The trails here are in poor condition, but are still open as of Wednesday (March 19). Ice conditions are beginning to deteriorate. Some folks are still venturing out, but not having too much success. Some of the spring lakes and lakes with a current are really starting to become questionable so always be careful before you venture out. Reports are coming in of turkeys starting to strut and folks starting to hear gobbles in the mornings. This is a great sign with the youth season less than a month away. - *Ben Mott, conservation warden, Wautoma*

Southeast Region

Milwaukee DNR Service Center area

Havenwoods State Forest - The bad news is that after the rain, temporary thaw, and refreezing, trails, especially main trails, are very icy! The good news is that red-winged blackbirds, sandhill cranes, and other early migrants have returned. Staff and visitors have also seen spiders skittering along on top of the snow! Willows twigs are showing color, and the sap is dripping. On a sunny day last week, a squirrel was observed getting a sweet drink from a broken sugar maple twig near the nature center. It's a great time to catch those very early signs of spring, just watch your step. - *Beth Mittermaier, natural resources educator*

Kettle Moraine State Forest, Lapham Peak Unit - The man-made cross-country ski trail loop was groomed Tuesday morning, tracks were left alone. Warm temps in the afternoon have softened the snow. Depending on rain/snow and temps, the man-made snow will be groomed Wednesday morning. Lights on, man-made loop only, until 10 p.m. Monday through Saturday.

Kettle Moraine State Forest, Northern Unit - Seasonal temperatures have returned to the forest, resulting in a meltdown of the snow base. The Zillmer ski trails were groomed early Saturday morning, March 15, likely for the last time this season. As of March 17, the trails are still skiable, but forecasted rain and warm temps will erode conditions quickly this week. Please use caution, and be alert for icy conditions and standing water. All snowmobile trails within the forest are closed. - *Deb Harder, visitor services associate*

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Southern Lake Michigan fisheries team report - *Compiled from creel clerks by Cheryl Masterson and Jeffrey Zinuticz, fisheries technicians, Milwaukee*

Sheboygan County - In Sheboygan, the base of the Sheboygan River at the south pier has opened up. The river upstream still has spots of solid ice, but it is starting to break up near the Kohler Dam. There has been little to no sign of fishing pressure on the river due to ice conditions. Near the Harbor Centre Marina and the Deland boat launch, anglers have been fishing through the ice with tip-ups. The last couple of days have been a tough bite, and anglers have had to fight the high winds coming off the lake. The Pigeon River is still frozen in numerous places, but does show signs of the ice breaking up. There has been no sign of fishing pressure there yet.

Ozaukee County - In Port Washington, public access to the north pier is not allowed at this time. The breakwall is in need of major repairs and is currently unsafe for walking. The Army Corps of Engineers will be working on it this summer, currently scheduled to begin in July. Anglers fishing near the power plant discharge on the north and south sides of the mouth of Sauk Creek have had some success using spawn sacs fished on the bottom, and some have been using minnows in the same manor. There has been a number of brown trout caught and a couple of steelhead. The water clarity deteriorated over the weekend due to high winds coming in from the east. There are some areas of Sauk Creek that have ice along the edges. The creek is mostly open up to Pierre Lane; there has been no sign of fishing pressure thus far.

Milwaukee County - In Milwaukee strong northeast winds have blown the ice against the Riverfront boat launch, making it impossible to launch a boat as of Sunday. McKinley harbor is still completely frozen with up to 30 inches of ice reported in the harbor. There were no anglers seen fishing the Summerfest lagoon or fishing along the wall due the wind keeping the ice against the wall making it impossible to cast into open water. There have been people out ice fishing, and a few browns were picked up using tip downs with spawn sacs or small shiners. A few anglers were seen fishing in the river channel for browns, but floating ice packs prevented fishing for any extended periods of time. The area under the Hoan Bridge at Jones Island has been closed to public access due to the construction on the bridge itself. It is been fenced off and it appears as though it won't open until the construction of the bridge is complete. There were some people fishing for rainbows in Oak Creek, but fishing was very slow this weekend. The Oak Creek power plant fishing pier is closed until April 1 this season, unlike in past years where it was open March 15. The Bender Park boat ramp is blocked due to floating ice. The Milwaukee River is mostly covered with ice with a few spots open. The areas with open water were the section directly above the North Avenue dam, Estabrook falls, Kletzsch falls, and a few areas near the UWM Park and Ride lot. The overall water clarity is relatively dirty, and the water level appears to be holding steady. The Menomonee River is above normal water level with very dirty water due to snow melt. A few anglers have been fishing at the MMSD offices for brown trout, and a few have been taken.

Racine County - In Racine, ice cover on the Root River began to melt this week. The river is free of ice from the Horlick Dam through Quarry Lake Park. Flows are high, the river is muddy, and ice jams have formed on some of the narrow sections of the river. Large sections of the river from Colonial Park to Washington Park were still covered with ice as of Saturday. Fishing pressure at the Horlick Dam was steady over the weekend with an average of 4-6 anglers fishing below the dam at any given time. Most were fishing with yarn flies, caddis flies, and egg patterns, but a few used spawn sacks under slip bobbers. A few browns have been caught below the dam. Further downriver, fishing has been slow. Most of the river at Lincoln Park was covered with ice over the weekend, but there were large sections of open water. Much of the river was still ice covered in Island and Washington Parks as well. Open water could be found at Clayton Park, but the river was ice covered from the Marquette Street Bridge to ReefPoint Marina. At the Racine lakefront the Pershing Park boat launch area was mostly ice free except for a pack of small ice floes drifting around the harbor. The lake ice has moved offshore, with open water as far as the eye can see. Both the north and south piers in Racine are covered in significant layers of ice, making fishing access dangerous. Most fishing pressure at the Racine lakefront has been concentrated at ReefPoint Marina with anglers fishing through the ice. Steelhead, browns, and occasional northern pike have been caught on a variety of baits fished under tip ups, including spawn sacs, white Gulp, and shiners. Anglers have reported the ice at the west end of ReefPoint Marina was 14 to 20 inches on March 14.

Kenosha County - In Kenosha, the Pike River is open in the Petrifying Springs Park area. The water is cloudy with sticks and other debris flowing downstream. No anglers were seen on the river on Sunday. At the lakefront, the ice cover in the Simmons Island boat harbor began to break up over the weekend. The harbor mouth is open water, but fishing pressure off the piers has been light. Fishing pressure along the Kenosha shoreline was steady over the weekend, but success was minimal. There is fishable open water behind the Best Western Hotel, but the water is quite cloudy.

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Waukesha DNR Service Center area

Waukesha County - Wildlife sign increases across the area on a daily basis. Red-winged blackbirds, sandhill cranes, and killdeer are just some of the bird species that can be seen at local wildlife areas. The remaining snow has revealed tracks of coyotes, otters, deer, and turkeys. Flocks of ducks are circling over areas that are or soon will be open water. Longer daylight hours provide a great opportunity to get back outdoors and keep track of spring phenology. - *Kelly VanBeek, wildlife biologist, Waukesha and Walworth Counties*

Plymouth DNR Service Center area

Sheboygan County - Very little inland fishing pressure recently and murky water due to recent snowmelt has slowed steelhead fishing on the Sheboygan River. On March 12 there was open water on the Sheboygan River upstream from the 14th Street Bridge. - *Michael Clutter, conservation warden, southern Sheboygan County*

Theresa Marsh State Wildlife Area - Water levels from melt off have caused local frozen ponds and streams to rise. Three more stop logs were taken out of the Theresa Marsh dam today to help pass more water and to allow for northern pike and other fish spawning across the dam. Several hundred Canada geese are now scattered around the marsh, mostly hanging out on top of the ice. Most appear to be the locally nesting "giants" and not the "interior" species that will be stopping on their migration to Canada. Other wildlife seen this week included robins, great blue herons, tracks/slide of an otter, and several pairs of sandhill cranes. Many more groups of turkeys were seen this week around the area and apparently came through winter alive. A fish kill was reported and investigated on Allenton Marsh, in the ponds west of Wildlife Road, and was likely caused by a lack of oxygen from the hard winter. Several hundred panfish and small bass died. - *Tom Isaac, wildlife biologist, Hartford*

South Central Region

Dodgeville DNR Service Center area

Grant County - Spring is coming slowly to Grant County. For those watching the progress of the spring melt, the main channel near Cassville has opened along with portions of Hurricane Chute out from the McCartney boat landing. All boat landings remain locked in ice. The ice still remains in close proximity to the Dubuque Lock and Dam #11 which is a normal early season sauger and walleye fishing area. An angler stated that he did catch one 15 inch sauger off of the Eagle Point fishing barge this past weekend. Currently the fishing barge is surrounded by ice limiting fishing opportunities. Several early waterfowl migrants have arrived in the area. Hundreds of common mergansers and scaup (blue bills) have been seen out from McCartney boat landing and in the main channel at Cassville. One sandhill crane was observed in the grassy lowland field on the Wisconsin Riverway West of Highway 18 at County C in Wyalusing Township. Ice fishing is quickly coming to a close with access to the ice severely limited in most areas as the ice has melted near the shorelines. Anglers this past weekend needed knee high boots to wade the shallow water out to the ice. A few bluegills and crappies were caught with several small bass caught and released. River of Lakes resort anglers have been accessing the ice by using the boat docks. A few bluegills and crappies were caught fishing a jig right near the river bottoms. - *Richard S. DeWitte, conservation warden, Cassville*

Iowa County - Coyote hunter's have been very happy with the snow that fell and has remained in southern Iowa County. Trout anglers have been having success in southern Iowa County on Gordon Creek using blue wing olive early emerging patterns and have been catching some nice brown trout. Trout anglers are reminded that this early season is catch and release only. Turkey hunter's out scouting and shed hunters are reminded to wear some blaze orange while out and about. People who are out and about in the woods are being asked to report dead or sick wildlife that they find to the local warden or they can call the 1-800-TIP-WDNR number. Robins have returned to Iowa County as have sandhill cranes. Bird watchers have reported that bluebird scouts have been back for about a month now looking for suitable places to nest and raise their young. Now is the time to clean out those bluebird houses from last year if you haven't done so already. - *David Youngquist, conservation warden, Dodgeville*

Snow cover is minimal, but it is still clinging to north-facing slopes. Wildlife sightings include robins as well as common grackles. A report of numerous trumpeter swans and white-fronted geese were seen at Bakkens Pond on the Lower Wisconsin Riverway. Red fox pups are being born, as well as fox & gray squirrel young. Buds on some area lilacs are beginning to swell. The first day and night of over 50 degrees will begin the process of frogs and other amphibians to emerge from winter hibernation. Wood frogs will be the first to begin their breeding calls. - *Travis Anderson, wildlife biologist, Dodgeville*

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Wyalusing State Park - Hiking trails for the most part remain snow covered. Temperatures above freezing continue to make a "dent" in the snow pack. Expected highs in the upper 40s on Thursday and Friday will help to melt more of the snow. Ski trails are closed for this season. Once again, Turkey Hollow, Whitetail Meadow and Prairie Trail are open for hiking. The frozen waterfalls at Pictured Rock Cave (found on Sugar Maple Nature Trail) and Big Sand Cave and Little Sand Cave are popular destinations. Sugar Maple Nature Trail can be accessed near the boat landing (uphill all the way) or by parking in the park office parking lot and hiking the road to Homestead Campground and the road with sites 245-255 towards Homestead Shelter. The bird feeders at the Wyalusing State Park Office continue to provide food for the birds and enjoyment for park staff and visitors. Chickadees, juncos, nuthatches, cardinals, blue jays, and woodpeckers are enjoying the sunflower seeds and suet. Warmer temps mean that squirrels and raccoons will venture out in search of food. Robins, a welcome sign of spring, returned to Wyalusing State Park earlier this week. Killdeer have been seen in the area as well as sandhill cranes. Cardinals can be heard "whistling" every morning. Other returning migrants include: mallards, tundra swans, Canada geese, turkey vultures, northern flickers, red-winged blackbirds, bluebirds, and a lone catbird. - *Beverly Pozega, visitor services associate*

Horicon Marsh State Wildlife Area - As the spring thaw comes and goes we are starting to receive reports of the first migrating birds. Canada geese, white-fronted geese, sandhill cranes, red-winged blackbirds, great blue herons and song sparrows have all braved the cold weather and have been seen in and around the Horicon Marsh Area. There have been a few reports of wood ducks, common and hooded mergansers and mallards. With the warmer weather and south winds we are expecting waterfowl numbers to increase in the coming days. Let the migration begin! - *Elizabeth Herzmann, natural resources educator*

Fitchburg DNR Service Center area

Columbia County - Snowmobile trails in Columbia County are closed. The warmer weather and rain have methodically beaten down the snow. Dirt and grass are starting to peek out. Ice fishing remains slow in the southern half of the county. The Maple Syrup festival is scheduled for Saturday, April 5 at the MacKenzie Environmental Center. More details can be found on the DNR's website at <http://dnr.wi.gov/education/mackenzie/events.html>. - *Ryan Volenberg, conservation warden, Poynette*

The sandhill cranes returned to Columbia County from Florida this past Sunday morning as well an increased number of ducks and Canada geese. A reminder that unattended ice fishing shacks need to be removed even though most local lakes still have a lot of ice. There is open water on the Wisconsin River down past Highway O boat launch. Spring flooding for the Wisconsin River is still being predicted with high probability that it could be close to another record. - *Paul Nadolski, conservation warden, Portage*

Spring is on its way and wildlife is responding. Thousands of Canada goose are on the move through the county along with several species of ducks and sandhill cranes, even though there's very little open water on the landscape. That said, it looks like many area marshes are on the verge of opening up. Many local creeks are running very high and some are even flooded out of their banks. Turkeys are responding to the longer days and many toms have been seen strutting and have been heard gobbling on the roost. It appears some pheasants were able to make it through this tough winter as two roosters were seen sparring in the middle of Highway 60 near the Lodi Marsh. Eagles have been seen prepping their nest at French Creek Wildlife Area. - *Sara Kehrli, wildlife biologist, Poynette*

Dane County - Foxes and coyotes are being seen during the day as they pursue mates and patrol territories. Squirrel breeding season has begun. Warmer temperatures and thaw has opened up better feeding conditions for deer and turkeys across Dane County. We are mostly snow-free in the farm fields. Biologists saw large numbers of deer at dusk on March 16 in Eastern Dane County (100 plus deer). Sandhill cranes have arrived on territories and are displaying/calling. Some turkey vultures have returned and are patrolling for dead animals to feed on. Lots of bird song in the mornings including woodpeckers, nuthatches, chickadees, tufted titmice, red-winged blackbirds, Carolina wren and song sparrows. - *Andy Paulios, wildlife biologist, Fitchburg*

Sauk County - With the late spring the fishing on the Wisconsin River has been slower than normal years. There has been several nice catches of walleyes and saugers below the Prairie du sac dam. Last week there were three anglers in a boat and they each had three legal walleyes and saugers below the Prairie du Sac dam on the Wisconsin River. The legal limit on the Wisconsin River below the dam is 3 per person. Several individuals have been out looking for shed antlers. The buck deer have been losing their antlers and shed hunters have been finding some nice antlers. The bluebirds have been looking for nesting spots. People that have bluebird houses should clean them out and disinfect the houses. This should be done very soon due to the fact the bluebirds will be picking their nesting site shortly. - *John Buss, conservation warden, Prairie du Sac*

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Sauk Prairie Recreation Area - Sightings and sounds of killdeer, red-winged blackbirds, bluebirds, trumpeter swans, sandhill cranes and others are being reported. - *Nancy Frost, wildlife biologist, Madison*

West Central Region

Baldwin DNR Service Center area

St. Croix County - Cold and snow is still hanging on, but snowmobile trails are officially closed. Panfish are still biting on some area lakes like Menomin in Dunn County and Cedar and Bass in St. Croix County. Travel on the lakes is difficult due to deep snow and slush that has refrozen. Boat anglers on the Mississippi River near Redwing are catching sauger and walleye, with sauger being more common. Boat access on the Wisconsin side in Hager City has been open. Area trout streams in Pierce County have been busy with catch and release anglers on the warmer days. Runoff has still been minimal due to colder temps. - *David A. Hausman, warden supervisor, Baldwin*

Willow River State Park - All trails are still snow covered, however recent warm weather has greatly degraded the ski trails. All trails are now open to hiking and snowshoeing. Parts of the trail system are still skiable however the trails are no longer being regularly groomed. The river is running only slightly above normal. Early trout season is underway and anglers are finding fishable trout water below the dam to Troutbrook Road. Late ice anglers are also venturing out as the warm weather has improved the access to the lake. Anglers are reporting good fishing in both the lake and river. - *Aaron Mason, park superintendent*

Kinnickinnic State Park - All trails are still snow covered, however recent warm weather has greatly degraded the ski trails. All trails are now open to hiking and snowshoeing. The river is running only slightly above normal. Early trout season is underway and anglers are finding fishable trout water near County Road F and are reporting good luck. - *Aaron Mason, park superintendent*

La Crosse DNR Service Center area

Vernon County - People who feed birds should keep a sharp eye on the birds frequenting feeders during the coming weeks. Purple finches are a common early spring migrant in southern Wisconsin. Often confused with the resident, exotic house finch, with which it may associate at feeders, a male purple finch is more uniformly colored than house finches. Also note the purple finch's broad dark jaw stripe, dark ear patch, light stripe behind the eye, and large bill. Purple finch numbers typically peak in late April and the birds rapidly advance to their breeding areas in northern Wisconsin by early May. Just like clockwork, numerous bird species that are short-distance migrants recently arrived back in the area. Red-winged blackbirds, grackles, and robins have arrived in droves, while lesser numbers of killdeer, bluebirds, and eastern meadowlarks have filled in the gaps. Short-distance migrants respond more to weather clues, so they can gradually move northward as weather improves. Long-distance migrants depend on changes in day length to trigger their migration. It is believed that short-distance migrants can get a jump on resources and outcompete long-distance migrants that arrive later in a region. A whooping crane has been observed repeatedly in the vicinity of Gays Mills in central Crawford County, treating birdwatchers to a rare treat of the world's most endangered crane. White pelicans have also shown up in the open water of the Mississippi River. - *Dave Matheys, wildlife biologist, Viroqua*

Black River Falls DNR Service Center area

Black River State Forest - Spring may officially arrive on Thursday but the temperatures are still slightly below average in the Black River area. The snowmobile and ATV trails are closed for the season. The trails will reopen for ATVs on May 15. We do not recommend skiing at this time. Trails were groomed for the final time on March 5. Daytime temperatures above freezing and nights below freezing have resulted in icy unsafe conditions. Snowshoeing is the one winter activity that still has good conditions available. - *Peter Bakken, superintendent*

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Eau Claire DNR Service Center area

Chippewa County - Weather has been warming up consistently over the past several weeks, and much of the snow is melting. Wildlife has been observed due to the increasing temperature including: emerging raccoons, turkeys, deer and pheasants. Individuals are reminded to view wildlife from a safe distance and from a safe location if near a roadway. Snowmobile trail conditions are reaching the point of closure with significant portions of the trail showing bare ground. Snowmobile riders are encouraged to check trail conditions before going out to ride and reminded about the 55 mph night time speed limit. Anglers are out enjoying the nice warm weather, some successful bluegill and crappie fishing has been seen around area lakes in 15 to 20 feet of water. Anglers are reminded that sport fishing season is closed until the opener of May 3, 2014. Anglers are reminded that the expiration of fishing licenses is fast approaching with the expiration date of 03/31/2014. Anglers are reminded that ice shacks must be brought off of the ice daily and that current ice conditions are unpredictable so use caution. Trappers are reminded that the closure of otter trapping season in the Central and Southern Zone is March 31, 2014. Beaver season closure of the Southern Zone C is also closed on March 31, 2014. See the trapping regulations for Northern Zone season closure for beaver and otter. - *John Schreiber, conservation warden, Cornell*

Wisconsin Rapids DNR Service Center area

Wood County - We received about an inch of snow last night with one or more inches predicted for the remainder of the day. We still have complete snow cover with snow depth at about one foot in the woods around Wood County. At the latitude of Necedah the snow is definitely receding with open patches in fields and woods. From Wisconsin Dells south fields are open and over half of the snow is gone in the woods. Syrup buckets were spotted in the woods behind the meeting center at Barn at Harvest Moon Lake just east of Poynette. A turkey gobbler in the early morning has not been heard yet, which is not normal for this time of year. - *Bob Hess, conservation biologist, Wisconsin Rapids*

Buckhorn State Park - Spring at the park is great to watch for migratory birds. Our sandhill cranes and osprey have not returned yet but should be arriving soon bringing warmer weather with them. Ski trails are icy and in fair to poor condition with the melting snow. Some parts of roads are icy in the park, please drive with caution. - *Heather Wolf, park manager*

Roche-A-Cri State Park - We are looking for camp hosts for the summer. Call the Buckhorn office at 608-565-2789 if interested. - *Heather Wolf, park manager*

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The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Outdoor Report is a compilation of outdoor recreation information from DNR offices around the state. A variety of DNR staff, including conservation wardens, fish and wildlife biologists, naturalists, educators and customer service representatives, contribute information to the Outdoor Report. The Outdoor Report is issued each Thursday with information gathered in the previous week. People traveling to or within Wisconsin should call ahead to where they will be traveling for the most current conditions. Additional recreation information can be found on the Department of Tourism Web site at <http://www.travelwisconsin.com>.

